

who are called to follow it know assuredly that the Holy Spirit is ever at hand to guide their uncertain and often faltering steps onward to that place where worship and intercession are fused in silent adoration before the Throne of God.

No very plain directions, save perhaps one only. It can be plainly said that this way is recognisable as being the royal road of the Cross. Each one who travels along it finds that it means for him denial of self, mortification, patient perseverance and, finally, it may well be, the call to suffer with Christ. But this surely brings confidence that it is the high road. For the Body of Christ, divided in its earthly manifestation, is One as it truly confronts the Cross. And as worshippers of the Crucified we know that each soul and each communion must reintegrate itself anew in that sovereign act whereby 'in that One died, all died'; for only so can we hope to know again in full measure the power which raised that broken body from the dead and glorified it in the transforming unity of the divine life.

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The writer wishes to acknowledge his debt, in many cases for ideas and in some cases whole phrases, to Bishop Neville Talbot, to the Reverend A. M. Ramsey and to the anonymous author of *Intercourse with God*, as well as to the Abbé Couturier's pamphlet, *The Universal Prayer of Christians for Christian Unity*. (Pax House.)

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SOME THOUGHTS ON THE UNIVERSAL PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

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Foreword by the Right Reverend the Lord Bishop of Oxford

FOREWORD

THIS pamphlet, together with a companion one (*The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity*), has been written by the Rev. Father Curtis, of the Community of the Resurrection, Mirfield, at the request of the Superiors of various Anglican religious communities for men. The pamphlets describe a great and growing movement of prayer for the unity of the Church of Christ, in which many thousands of Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, Anglicans, and members of the Churches of the Reformation, are associated with one another, particularly during the period from January 18th to January 26th every year. The Movement owes its present form to one whom I am proud to regard as a friend, the Abbé Couturier, of Lyons. Its methods are largely his discovery; the formulation of its underlying theological principles—a formulation illuminating in its analysis of the various states of mind which may detract from the perfect submission of our prayers to the will of God which should be their final determinant—is his work. Both the method and the theological basis of the Movement are clearly set out in these pamphlets.

I have no hesitation in commending the pamphlets most warmly to all Christians who recognise the disgrace inherent in our unhappy divisions, and who long to see it erased. I commend them even more warmly to those in whom the present fissiparous character of Christendom engenders neither remorse nor distress. Can anyone say how deeply the disunion active among Christians has wounded the sacred Body of Christ? It is at least possible—for my own part I believe it to be supremely probable—that, if the one visible Church had been able to resist the forces of disintegration which from time to time have broken it into an ever-increasing number of fragments, we should by now have reached a stage of Christian civilisation at which war between the nations would have become unthinkable. From the horrors of total warfare into which we have been plunged, we may see in the vision of a reunited Christendom a healing of the nations which shall put an end to war; and in the strength of that vision we should labour and pray with greater intensity than ever before for the realisation of our Lord's own prayer, *Ut omnes unum sint*—'That they all may be one.'

KENNETH OXON;

OXFORD.

All Souls' Day, 1940.

SOME THOUGHTS ON THE UNIVERSAL PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

THE movement towards Christian unity is, to the discerning eye of Faith, the most significant movement of our fateful age. And of all the activities which constitute that movement, the widespread work of prayer for the reunion of Christendom is discerned as the fullest of power and hope. Prayer for Christian unity takes this first place because, if rightly performed, it is the most securely and directly anchored in the intention of Him to whom all power in heaven and on earth has been given and who alone can estimate the relative importance of events and declare their final meaning. This work of prayer, therefore, charged as it is with unique promise, brings to those who see its significance a great sense of responsibility for its right performance. It is in essence the giving of our minds and wills into unity with our Lord's great prayer (recorded in the seventeenth chapter of St. John's Gospel) that all who love His name may be one in a unity visible and invisible, such as will manifest to the world His claim to be its divine Saviour. Uniting ourselves with this, His own sacred petition, and surrendering ourselves in union with the holy sacrifice of His death on Calvary for which in this prayer He 'consecrated Himself,' we pray with certainty as to the acceptability of our desires. For this prayer of ours is not only in harmony with the whole purpose of creation as revealed by the light of our common faith: but it springs in very truth from the longing and mandate of the Incarnate Son of God.

The work of prayer, the exercise as 'God's fellow-workers' of His (in some sense) delegated creativity, is a foundation of all true action; itself perhaps the primordial, most profoundly human mode of action. Now, this week of universal prayer so widely observed by Christians of all communions and races is not only (as is all prayer for this end) efficacious action, but *united Christian action*: an inspired discovery, it has proved, of a means by which the mystical Body, despite its tragic dividedness here on earth, can once again act as a whole. It thus

inaugurates a new epoch of concerted Christian action. Of this new total warfare against the Prince of Darkness and of Division, the advance guard, if one may so speak, is already on its way, and the army of the Lord of Hosts is year by year gathering strength. A brief sketch has been given in a companion pamphlet of the marvellous and indeed divinely assisted growth of this movement up to the present year. And we may be very sure that even if the oppression under which so many European nations now suffer renders the public observance of this week in the year 1941 less easy or even impossible, nevertheless as mighty a volume of intercession as before will rise from untold numbers of souls and groups of souls in every land : intercession, whether from parish, monastery, sick bed, internment camp, school or prison, all the more powerful for the isolation and persecution that would threaten to thwart it. Moreover, all these members of the visible portion of Christ's subjects praying thus with "one heart and mind" will be aware, as we in union with them shall become aware, that their sacrificial prayer is one with prayer stronger in volume and yet more single in intent : that is to say, with the incessant liturgy of heaven itself. For there beyond the veil the ever-enlarging throng of the blessed rejoice with all the saints to magnify the Lamb of God : pleading His sacrifice in suppliant adoration, that unto His saving presence and leadership all kindreds and generations may be (as in heaven, so on earth) gathered into the ordered unity of the Truth before the Throne of God.

Next in value of all human activities to prayer and the love it expresses, ranks the activity of thought, the helpmeet of prayer. Let us then, that we may pray the better, recall in thought the main reasons for which the recovery of the visible unity of Christendom must be a vital concern for every Christian. First comes the very nature and purpose of God. God the Holy Trinity is in three Persons one God. His life is thus eternally a life of fellowship in the bliss of mutual love. Desiring, because love cannot be jealous save of its inalienable rights, to share that bliss, it was the Father's eternal purpose that the whole human race should be raised to partake of that divine life of fellowship : that all mankind should be one with Himself and with one another through participation in the divine nature which He contemplates in His express image, the eternal Son in whom, by whom and for whom all were made.

Since disobedience let loose the divisive forces of sin, it was necessary for the fulfilment of this purpose that the Son of God should be obedient unto death in order by this sacrifice of Himself to 'gather into one' the scattered children of God. Thus the sacrifice of His *death* into which we have been baptised and which we 'declare' so often as we eat the Bread and drink of the Cup in Holy Communion, was itself grounded in the purpose of the Father sealed by the Blood of His own Son to gather all men into unity. Secondly, we may observe the working out of this principle upon the plane of human history : for the Son of God *in His manhood* made evident as the supreme desire of His human nature, the ultimate longing of His sacred heart, His will that all men might be visibly one in loving allegiance to Himself. He whose life was all intercession, in the unique and solemn hour when alone He allowed or rather willed men to overhear it, consecrated Himself as victim of love in His coming Passion, that all His disciples might be one as He and the Father are one. It was on the very eve of His Passion that, after bequeathing to us in the last supper the memorial of His sacrifice, He prayed His great High-Priestly prayer: 'Keep through thine own name those whom thou has given me that they may be one as we are. . . . And for their sakes I sanctify myself [Moffat translates : 'I consecrate myself'] that they also may be sanctified through the truth. Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also who shall believe on me through their word, that they all may be one : as thou, Father, art in me and I in thee that they also may be one in us : that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.' Does not this prayer contribute a new or as yet untreasured bond between Christians everywhere as simple and strong as the 'Our Father' itself? So that if we will but surrender ourselves to apprehend its meaning and to make it our own, it brings us all already into union, giving us foretaste or even first-fruits of the unity desired.

But before we make this supplication of our Lord's our own, He has something even simpler to ask of us : a two-fold act of penitence and of forgiving love. If the nature and purpose of God the Father demands the unity of the human race through His Son, and if the Passion of the Son our Redeemer was for the fulfilment of this unity in the visible unity of the Church, then we cannot but realise that the acquiescence of Christians in their disunion, to say nothing of our divisions themselves, is

due to sin : it is a scandal of disobedient self-will and ungrateful pride, calling us all to repentance. Here is our personal and individual failure to fulfil Christ's ' new commandment ' of love for the brethren, writ large in the letters of history. It is our sin—yours and mine : for ' all have sinned and come short of the glory of God,' that glory which our Lord said in that same prayer He ' had given ' us that we ' may be one ' as He and the Father are one. Further, penitence will incline us, so far from wishing to ' cast the first stone,' to be ardent to forgive. None, we shall discern, may rightly stand up to speak of Jesus and His Cross, who has not set himself truly free from the cherishing of past grievances, however bitter. It is as ' new creatures ' we must confront the world. And ' the first sacrifice God asks of us all is our sad memory of the past.' We must lay it at the feet of the Crucified.

But the Crucified belongs not only to us, not even to all Christians but to the whole world of men. Taking up our station by His Cross, we recognise that our divisions are not only an unthinkable scandal and blemish in the life of the Church, but an impediment, hard to exaggerate, in her work of witness. By our disunity, the witness of Christians to their faith is almost hopelessly crippled. How are we to bring home that the Church is God's unique representative sent with His divine authority to speak the Word of God when a dozen denominations are heard in every city each speaking with a different voice? How bring home to the heathen overseas, that the meaning of the religion, which provides so many various and apparently competitive bids for their allegiance, is love? Most conspicuous of all at such a time as this is the harm done by disunity (through its weakening of the cause of Christ) to the order of civilisation itself. Even agnostics seem to charge Christians with having been able to prevent, and through their dissensions failed to prevent, the present reign of blood and darkness. Now that the forces of Hell have been loosed, it is blindingly clear to all that mankind created to be one must find the way to unity or perish : to Christians at least it is a matter of certainty that all hopes of unity, save those aimed in unison with the heart of the Crucified and enthroned Lord, are bound to suffer defeat.

The human race, we know, cannot recover from its sickness unless it rediscovers the authority of the Right, of the so-called

' natural law,' and subjects itself again to that rule of God. But how is it to find its way back on to that great high road? For it has lost itself in a far country. There must be a Light to show the way. Where is that Light? Is it not the Light of Christ shining through His Church? *We* are the Light of the world, we who know whither we are going, and the Way we go and with whom we go. ' What the soul is in the body, are Christians in the world': a ' light to lighten the Gentiles.' But if the darkness is not to overcome it, this light must shine, not with dispersed rays from under the bushels of self-will and pride, but with unbroken, piercing splendour such as gives light to all the house, and causes men without to glorify the one God and Father of all. Only singleness of mind can fill the Body of Christ with this resplendent light so that becoming ' Light in the Lord,' we may illuminate the world—light that manifests, light that reproves, light that gives knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

As much, then, for the world's sake as for our own must we Christians, through single-hearted unanimity in this prayer of Christ, seek the fulfilment and the manifestation of the unity of our faith.

No genuine prayer ever goes unanswered : still less any prayer for an object known to be dear to God. Hence all prayer for Christian Unity will be fruitful. Nevertheless its fruitfulness will be in proportion to the degree in which it is in the Name and Spirit of our Lord : hence the great importance of being attuned to the mind of our Lord as expressed in His own prayer. Moreover, it will be easily seen that there are other channels, which prayer might take, that are going to be for other reasons also less hopeful : the use of these tending to breed a wrong attitude to the problem concerned and indeed a wrong relationship with our fellow-Christians of other Churches. For consider the three forms of channels which prayer for unity may take. Exaggerating for the sake of clearness (no form of prayer is perhaps ever so simple in type), we will call them the way of sentiment, the way of assertion, the way of abandonment.

(a) The way of sentiment

The way of sentiment, or of subjectivity, has as its weakness that, failing to face hard facts, it relies too much on the human though God-given forces of fellow-feeling and brotherliness, too

little on the Act and Truth of God Himself. 'O Lord God may all we Christians forget our differences, stop quarrelling and love one another.' It is perhaps unconsciously assumed in such a prayer that, because unity is an urgent necessity and universally desired, it must therefore be easy of achievement. That is a great fallacy. A spirit of brotherliness fomented by prayer will no doubt go a long way. But it will not go all the way. It will not give us a Christendom strong enough to challenge, to convict, and to hold together, a warring world. And the prayer motivated by kindly emotion which has not submitted to the discipline of truth, will tend to faint and fall away when the goal is seen to be one which is, humanly speaking, impossible of attainment. It is not a spirit of unity which is required, but the Unity of the Spirit. The floodgates of hell, themselves also belonging largely to the sub-intellectual zone of sentiment, will prevail against any unity or urge towards unity that is not based on assent to truth as revealed by the Holy Ghost. The world has known so often the frailty of a comradeship but merely human cohesion, such as is well parodied in the 'Froth-blower's anthem': 'The more we are together, the merrier we shall be.' Is there or is there not, it asks, in Christ, as the revelation of the one God, a bond and secret of unity undiscoverable elsewhere? Can Christianity, because it is Truth itself, given by God to men and not made by men, do for the world that which its best impulses—even religious impulses—cannot do? The question of unity is thus essentially a question of *truth*. And to remain willingly blind to the vital nature of the differences between Christians *which are lively often in proportion to the depth of their faith*, is to impede rather than to help our prayer. For these hard facts cause suffering, and suffering gives wings to prayer—rightly used, *is* prayer. To sing 'Auld lang syne' in the dark with joined hands may mean a deeper loneliness when the lights go on. Conversely, we Christians are often closest to one another when we are agreeing to differ: we are thus known to one another as belonging to but one Master, the living Truth. Therefore we must and will enter upon prayer, conscious on the one hand of our credal unity through our allegiance to our Lord as God incarnate, and on the other of our painful disunity on vital questions concerning the implications in doctrine and practice of this basic truth.

(b) The way of assertion

Secondly, there is what may be called the way of assertion. Here the prayer rises from the heart of the believer through the medium of his intelligence, but translates itself into and limits itself by the concepts which are the special heritage of his communion. With eyes open to the differences between us and confident that some Christian truth is ours which in other communions is absent or inarticulate, we ask God to show them this truth which nourishes our soul or even to bring them into our own Church as the unique haven of true faith. A quality of hidden self-assertion often colours such prayer: it has even touched at certain points the most venerable liturgies of Christendom.

Moreover, the tendency to 'proselytise' in the wrong sense may easily be bred by such prayer, at least if we are not careful to cast our prayers, so concerned, for purification into our Lord's own supreme act of resignation: 'Not my will but thine be done.'

Such prayers if uttered in good faith, will not go for nothing. And all true prayer needs to be vitalised by sentiment and sanctioned by the understanding. But we need to remember that our Lord's searching challenge to the sons of Zebedee confronts all prayer into which self in any form has entered: 'Ye know not what ye ask. . . .' (Mark x. 38.)

(c) A more excellent way

There is, after all, a more excellent way, the way of loving abandonment to the will of God: the type of prayer which theologians know by the perhaps unexpressive name, 'the prayer of faith.' The zone of this prayer is the realm *above* the conceptualising intellect, just as the zone of sentimentality lies below it. All who have been taught the meaning and practice of prayer in those two great schools of prayer which are the 'Our Father' and the Holy Eucharist, know something of this way. It is a way already familiar to those who have learnt to listen in silence for the voice of the Holy Spirit interceding within them, and to abandon themselves to His prayer.

1. The first three petitions of the Lord's Prayer lead us along this way of abandonment. For none can conceive himself to know precisely all that the hallowing of the Name, the coming

of the Kingdom, the doing of the Will entails. To say the 'Our Father' slowly, sentence by sentence, offering our wills to include all that each phrase should mean to us as representatives of the whole family of God, is surely a process that purifies and enlarges the soul. We are brought each time to apprehend more fully that which the mind can never comprehend—the 'breadth and length and height and depth' of the 'love of Christ that passeth knowledge.' We learn that what is explicit in our own partial understanding of the prayer is less valuable than the surrender of our wills to all that which is implicit therein to our Lord its author.

2. A similar process surely occurs when we offer intercession at Holy Communion. For here we know, whatever our precise beliefs as to the method of His presence, that we are brought into direct relationship with Him who 'ever liveth to make intercession for us' (Heb. vii. 25) and 'enter into the fellowship of His sacrifice.*' An anecdote may illustrate what this may mean for us. An intercessor present at a service of Holy Communion in which the collect was used 'that we may obtain our petitions, make us to ask such things as shall please thee' records how he was taught once and for all by the Holy Spirit vividly to realise that our Lord Himself was seeking his soul as a channel, not for the granting of that soul's petitions, but, as it were, *for the obtaining of His own*: that He Himself was humbly asking for a channel through which His life might go forth to touch souls. The experience led to a re-orientation of the prayer-life, to a new realisation of God's initiative in prayer, to the conviction that the highest function of the Christian intercessor is to be the channel or instrument of God's own love.

There is no need of any such special experience to lead us to enter upon the way of abandonment. The call thus to surrender ourselves to God as His fellow-workers, springs from His own nature as Love. This new aspect of prayer, it has been well said, stands in relation to the old as algebra to arithmetic. Arithmetic is easier for the simple problems, but it only solves some of them. Algebra seems harder for the simple problems, but it solves them all, and is fruitful and appropriate in proportion to their difficulty. The important characteristic of algebra is the recognition that there is an unknown quantity—

* From a Congregationalist service book.

what God desires. In the arithmetical type of prayer, self, even if a gradually purified self, is the centre. In the algebraic type of prayer the centre is God. The same objects may be prayed for, but here the intercessor is under His direction, the instrument of His Will, and the channel of His love and power. Such intercession, having its centre and spring in God, has no limit to its development and possibilities. Neither time nor space can compass it nor impede the growth of the soul that gives itself generously to this way of abandonment.

3. So we are led on to speak of the place of silence in prayer. For we grow to learn the need of it from following this way. No longer does the intercessor who has begun to follow it, rush into the presence of God pouring out his demands. He knows that *he* is not the initiator and that he must hush his soul to hear the voice of the Spirit. He begins to plumb the depths of the apostolic teaching: 'We do not know how to pray aright, but the Spirit pleads for us with sighs that are beyond words [might we not paraphrase 'beyond concepts' ?] and he who searches the human heart knows what is in the mind of the Spirit, since the Spirit pleads before God for the saints' (Rom. viii. 26-8: Moffatt's translation). He finds that he must take time to be quiet, time for worship during which all that is of self may be laid aside, time for letting the realisation of God possess him. Then and not till then will his most fruitful prayer begin (though what has preceded is a real part and no mere preliminary of prayer—the very detachment from his own anxiety and claimfulness is efficacious as having the nature of trust), and this prayer in fullest exercise he will often find to be but a wordless longing that God's will may be done and God's love satisfied, through the union of all in Him who is the fountain at once of wisdom and of unity. Certainly the effort demanded by this prayer is greater—again and again, sometimes because of its cost and tedium, sometimes for quite wholesome reasons—we fall back for a time on to the arithmetical plane. But the results of this prayer are also greater—inconceivably so: for the intercessor is making the soul a channel through which the whole wealth of the unitive love of God may enrich His impoverished and divided family. Souls walking on this road can give no very plain directions for its pursuit: they can only sometimes open, as it were, a window to show to another the view they have seen. But let those